

Chris O'Brien

From: Mary Dwyer <MDwyer@CommunityCareRI.org>
Sent: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 10:52 AM
To: Chris O'Brien
Subject: Written Testimony for New Article--Telemedicine
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Thank you,

Mary F. Dwyer
Senior Vice President
Community Support and Recovery Services
Community Care Alliance
55 John Cummings Way
PO Box 1700
Woonsocket, RI 02895
401-235-7060
Fax: 401-235-7104
email: mdwyer@CommunityCareRI.org
website: <http://www.communitycareri.org>

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401.235.7000
CommunityCareRI.org
PO Box 1700 Woonsocket, RI 02895

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Marvin Abney
Chairman Abney and Members of House Finance

I am writing in support of the Governor's Budget Article relating to Telemedicine. The lived experience of telephonic communication during the CoVid crisis has been eye-opening for me. As an experienced Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Certified in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, working for over 35 years with clients with severe and persistent mental illnesses living in the community, I had believed that telemedicine would be an ineffective assessment and treatment modality. I was wrong.

I am also supporting the written testimony of Benedict Lessing, CEO Community Care Alliance.

As the Senior Vice-President of Community Support and Recovery Services at CCA, overseeing the treatment of over 1000 clients and greater than 100 staff, I have received feedback from both clients and staff about the positives that have occurred by using telehealth. The following are a selection of statements from those who have experienced telehealth.

"I have multiple clients with multiple health issues who would otherwise have been put at extreme risk coming in for sessions. They expressed their gratitude for being able to stay safe at home and still have their sessions."

"For a lot of our clients social isolation is very detrimental to their mental health so being able to continue treatment via telehealth helped maintain their stability."

One client who cannot wear a mask or have anything on her face without having a panic attack was very limited as to what she was able to do. She needed to have delivery services for groceries and supplies as she could not enter grocery stores without a mask. She would not be allowed into the Center without a mask as well and is very appreciative for telehealth.

One clinician remarked, "I have my own health issues so it allowed me to continue to do the work I love, stay connected with my clients and stay as safe and healthy as possible."

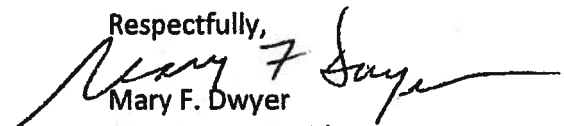
"Some clients who were previously difficult to engage in psychiatric provider appointments are now engaged in attending telehealth sessions and are being more honest and open about their symptoms."

Community Mental Health Centers are the designated health home for clients with serious mental illnesses and are integral in coordinating medical care for our clients. Clients with mobility issues, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Immunosuppressive Conditions (to name a few) have benefitted tremendously from telehealth. Sessions with providers are more accessible and safer for them. These populations would be prime candidates for telehealth for their safety well after the threat of CoVid is gone.

The CoVid pandemic has been a learning experience for all. It has identified telehealth as a valuable intervention to keep clients and providers safe. Having this tool as one of the only ones available, we experienced just how valuable it is in treatment and should be an option well after the CoVid virus is gone. If clients choose to participate in telehealth sessions rather than face to face sessions, they should have the choice to do so. It should cost no more for the client, nor be reimbursed to the provider at a lower level. The cost of providers per hour is the same whether or not they are performing face to face sessions or telehealth.

In all likelihood CoVid will be with us for a long time. Telehealth is a crucial tool to the well-being of clients and staff. I urge you to support the Governor's Budget Article relating to Telemedicine.

Respectfully,



Mary F. Dwyer

Senior Vice President

Community Support and Recovery Services

Community Care Alliance

55 John Cummings Way

PO Box 1700

Woonsocket, RI 02895

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email: mdwyer@CommunityCareRI.org

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